

Immersion in God's Gifts: Reflecting on Confirmation through Hagiography

1. Read about St. Philip Neri:

St. Philip Neri (1515-1595) is the patron saint of joy, as well as of Confirmation. He experienced his own personal Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon him. During this personal Pentecost, he received the Gifts of the Holy Spirit deeply into his heart, to the extent that his heart was physically enlarged. In being so filled with the Holy Spirit, he was filled with great joy. It was not uncommon for St. Philip Neri to give singing and dancing as a penance to his penitents at Confession. St. Philip Neri sought to humble the faithful so that they would trust in God, and raise their hearts to adoring Him with joy. In encouraging others to be "fools for Christ" who concerned themselves only with serving God, and evangelizing by sharing their joy, at the risk of being misunderstood by the world, St. Philip Neri encouraged people to open their hearts to receiving more of God's love, a perfect peace that comes from enthroning God in our lives.

As a young man, St. Philip Neri read about missionaries like St. Francis Xavier. He aspired to be like them by traveling the world to convert souls to Christ, but God had a different plan for St. Philip Neri, one that was just as wonderful. God willed that St. Philip Neri should remain local, and serve the people around him, helping to restore order in a time of change, when the Protestant Reformation was sowing seeds of uncertainty among the faithful in the Church. By remaining right where he was, St. Philip Neri helped others to advance spiritually, and to experience the boundlessness of God's love. Having entrusted himself to the Holy Spirit, St. Philip Neri could follow His inspirations, doing what would glorify God most. He cultivated greater love for Our Lord and Our Lady through special devotions such as the seven-church visitation on Holy Thursday, and the Philippine Rosary, a 63-bead rosary devotion that honors Our Lady's titles of "Virgin" and "Mother."

St. Philip Neri was perfected by the sorrows and joys in his life, offering them up for God's glory. He was capable of great empathy and contrition, weeping when he gazed at Christ's Corpus on the crucifix. Our joyful saint had the virtue of holy sadness, feeling compunction for sin that led him to make reparation to Christ, but he was not consumed by sadness, seeing the humor in life. Rather than taking himself too seriously, he took God seriously, and had a spirit of true happiness that came from harmonizing his life with God's Commandments, which are to love one another.

Living with love gave St. Philip Neri a joy that could never be extinguished, a joy he brought to all, who quite literally could feel the warmth of his heart, palpating with great love for God. Even near the point of his death, St. Philip was pouring all of himself out for love of God the Father, just like Jesus, hearing confessions and consoling others. The Holy Spirit's Gifts were embodied by St. Philip Neri, who had the courage to accept God's will, and to live out what God called him to do, so as to help others joyfully offer everything to God. St. Philip Neri truly had a big heart that beat for Christ's Heart, being given entirely to His service.

2. Meditate on the hagiography (holy biography/life of a saint) you just read. Write down your impressions, using the following prompts to guide you:

- What aspect of St. Philip Neri's life most resonated with you? What does St. Philip Neri teach you about how to apply the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in our lives?

- How did St. Philip Neri respond to the Holy Spirit after experiencing his personal Pentecost? How can you continue to respond to the Holy Spirit's promptings in your life?

- If a hagiography was to be written about you, what would you want to be remembered about your life? What would you want your legacy as a Catholic to be? How might you inspire others to live out the Gifts of the Holy Spirit?

3. Pray in response to the passage you read, offering God your meditations on it. You may use the following prompts to inspire your prayer:

- If you have not yet made your Confirmation, ask the Holy Spirit to inspire the good works you do to prepare for Confirmation.
- If you have made the sacrament of Confirmation, ask the Holy Spirit to inspire the good works you do to renew the graces of the sacrament of Confirmation.
- Ask God to enlighten your mind with understanding of what you have read, and to guide your contemplation, so that you may know how He is leading you to use what you have learned.
- Write down your prayer below:

4. Contemplate what God has spoken into your heart through prayer.

- If you have not already made the sacrament of Confirmation, how is God leading you to prepare for it? What would He have you do to deepen your spiritual life at this time?

- If you have made the sacrament of Confirmation, how is God leading you to use the graces you received at Confirmation?

- c. What does Confirmation mean to you? How would you share this with others, especially those who have not yet received their Confirmation?
